



CHOOSING TO STUDY GEOGRAPHY AND THE CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF FUTURE GRADUATES AND POSTGRADUATES

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Abstract

Several factors are bound to influence a young person's decision to study a particular study programme, including his or her interests and commitment, abilities and skills, career prospects, family expectations, social pressure and peer influence, the information and advice available to him or her and financial constraints. To find out what factors contribute to adolescents' decision to study geography and the career aspirations of future graduates and postgraduates, a survey was conducted in 2017 and 2020 at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana involving a total of 155 students in their first year of the first cycle and the first and the second year of the second cycle. The results will be of great help in the further development of the geography study, as knowledge of the factors influencing their decisions to study, as well as their career aspirations and expectations, will allow us to understand the low enrolment figures in geography studies in recent years (which are not comparable to those of the past in all three Slovenian departments of geography) and to find potential solutions or ways to improve the current situation.

Keywords: geography studies, career aspirations, decision to study, Slovenia

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ODLOČITEV ZA ŠTUDIJ GEOGRAFIJE TER POKLICNE ASPIRACIJE BODOČIH DIPLOMANTOV IN MAGISTRANTOV

Izvleček

Na odločitev mladostnika za določen študij zagotovo vplivajo številni dejavniki, med katerimi lahko izpostavimo predvsem njegove interese in predanost nečemu, sposobnosti in veščine, karierne možnosti, družinska pričakovanja, socialni pritisk in vpliv vrstnikov, informacije, ki so mu na voljo, in svetovanje, ki ga je deležen, ter finančne omejitve. Z namenom ugotoviti, kaj vse botruje odločitvi mladostnikov za študij geografije in kakšne so poklicne aspiracije bodočih diplomantov in magistrantov, smo leta 2017 in 2020 na Oddelku za geografijo FF UL izvedli raziskavo, v kateri je skupno sodelovalo 155 študentov prvih letnikov prve in druge stopnje ter drugih letnikov druge stopnje. Rezultati nam bodo v veliko pomoč pri nadaljnjem razvoju študija geografije, saj nam poznavanje dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na njihove odločitve za študij, ter njihovih poklicnih želja in pričakovanj omogoča razumeti nizke številke vpisa na študij geografije v zadnjih letih (ki na vseh treh slovenskih oddelkih za geografijo niso primerljive s preteklimi) ter poiskati potencialne rešitve oziroma pot k izboljšanju trenutne situacije.

Ključne besede: študij geografije, poklicne aspiracije, odločitev za študij, Slovenija

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent times, Slovenian university geography departments have been grappling with a significant decline in student enrolment in geography programmes. Notably, the Department of Geography at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, which used to implement entrance exams in the past, has now shifted away from this practice, reflecting a broader trend. This phenomenon is not unique to Slovenia and has been a subject of discussion in numerous countries for several decades, as noted by scholars like Gibson (2007) and Head and Rutherford (2021). The prevailing sentiment among these departments is that they are satisfied if they can attract sufficient students to fill the available slots, prompting them to continuously ponder the underlying causes of this situation and explore strategies to reverse this unfavourable trend.

Many scholars argue that higher education institutions across the globe have become targets of various neoliberal and globalizing processes. These processes, as identified by authors such as Barcan (2013), Lewis (2011), Olssen and Peters (2005), Shore and Taitz (2012), and Duffy-Jones (2017), encompass factors such as the massification of student numbers, the internationalization of higher education as a global

commodity, and the adoption of accountability practices intended to demonstrate a “return on investment” to governing bodies within universities. Collins and Lewis (2016) even suggest that these processes are part of a multifaceted agenda that includes the destruction of higher education. This agenda fundamentally transforms the traditional academic landscape, shifting it away from principles of community and collegiality and placing it under the governance of market forces and competition, as noted by Berg and Roche (1997, cited in Dufty-Jones, 2017).

However, it is essential to acknowledge that these processes are inherently complex, and it would be unwise to simplify them into a narrative of mere “decline” (Gibson, 2007). The challenges faced by geography departments and universities as a whole are multifaceted, and they require a nuanced and thoughtful approach to address the evolving landscape of higher education.

Can the exploration of the reasons for embarking on a career in geography offer a potential solution to the enigma described earlier? While it is widely acknowledged that “there has never been a more important time to use geographical knowledge and skills to pursue a career,” as articulated on the UK Geographical Association website, a fundamental question lingers: Can we effectively convey to the younger generation that in the 21st century, comprehension and resolution of the myriad changes and challenges confronting Slovenia and the world hinge on geography?

Despite our resolute belief that geography, by bridging the realms of the natural and the human, the local and the global, while addressing crucial matters such as climate change, energy security, migration, and urbanization, equips us to strategize for a sustainable future, it remains essential to persuade them that geography unfurls a diverse spectrum of opportunities for their forthcoming employment and career paths.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A multitude of factors come into play when young individuals contemplate their choices of particular study programmes. These factors include their personal interests and dedication, their aptitudes and competence, the perceived career prospects, familial expectations, societal pressures, peer influence, the availability of information and guidance, and, not insignificantly, financial constraints (Brooks, 2003; Eidimtas, Juceviciene, 2014; Piróg, 2018).

Adolescents typically opt for a course of study that resonates with their passions, hobbies, and commitments. When they harbour a genuine interest and enthusiasm for a subject, they are inclined to select a programme that allows them to explore and cultivate that interest. Concurrently, they often choose fields where their demonstrated abilities and skills align. Academic performance in a particular subject or domain during their prior schooling can significantly sway their choice to further pursue studies in that area.

The potential career opportunities arising from a specific course of study often feature prominently in their decision-making process. They embark on research to ascertain the available career options, job prospects, and avenues for career advancement within their chosen field. Equally impactful is the influence of their familial environment and their parents' expectations, which sometimes guide their choice of study in alignment with their family's desires.

Social and peer pressures can exert an additional layer of influence, albeit adolescents also stand to benefit significantly from well-informed decisions. Quality information about diverse study programmes, career trajectories, and the future of a particular field can markedly impact their choices. Advice from career counsellors, mentors, educators, and industry experts proves invaluable in facilitating informed decision-making. The awareness and understanding of the geographer profession within Slovenia are limited, leading to a common misconception among young individuals that their career options within geography are primarily confined to teaching in educational institutions.

Internationally, the discourse predominantly centres on the implementation of effective student recruitment procedures and strategies (Croot, 1999; Estaville et al., 2006; Hill et al., 2008; Piróg, 2018). However, in Slovenia, there exists a crucial need for empirical research to substantiate our assumptions regarding the perception of geography as a career choice in comparison to other academic disciplines. Presently, we lack scientific evidence to either validate or disprove the commonly asserted notion that young individuals favour subjects like chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, and the like, over geography when pursuing professional success.

Recent deliberations within academic circles have even leaned toward the perspective that geography tends to be chosen by students who were unable to secure admission into more highly regarded programmes, such as computer and information science, medicine, biochemistry, or pharmacy. Consequently, the scope of geography is often perceived as primarily limited to careers in education or as a field of applied inquiry. It's worth noting that today, job opportunities for geography graduates are indisputably abundant, as affirmed by data from the Zavod RS za zaposlovanje (Slovenian Employment Service, 2023) and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2023).

As Kubiak et al. (2012) emphasize, comprehending the perceptions of a subject is a fundamental facet of educational research. While studies investigating the perceptions of geography among students at various academic levels have been conducted in numerous countries (Fatima, 2016), the motivations behind choosing geography as a university major remain a relatively underexplored area (Solem et al., 2013; Piróg, 2018). Additionally, it's important to highlight another unique aspect associated with the study of geography: there exists a prevailing perception among young individuals and the general public that geography is primarily pursued by those aspiring to become geography teachers, often due to a lack of awareness regarding the broader career prospects that a geography degree can unlock.

Following a student's selection of a specific study programme, additional influential variables begin to exert their impact. Simultaneously, evaluating study programmes necessitates an understanding of various student aspects, including their engagement levels, acquired competence, career awareness, and for those, enrolled in teaching degree programmes, perceptions of the teaching profession. Milsom and Coughlin (2015) propose that student satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a study programme stems from introspection regarding self-discovered information and career insights. On the other hand, the adjustment to academic life significantly influences student success, underscoring the imperative to explore how diverse motivational and behavioural factors impact this adjustment and, consequently, academic achievement (van Rooij et al., 2018).

Upon entry into higher education, students bring forth specific personal traits and skills that undergo transformation and potential challenges within the new educational milieu. Successful adaptation to this environment, encompassing positive interactions with instructors and peers, as well as the management of heightened complexity within learning materials, dictates a student's contentment with their inaugural academic experience. Moreover, it directly affects their academic performance and progression to subsequent academic years (Astin, 1999; Pascarella, Terenzini, 2005; Sevinç, Gizir, 2014). Lowe and Cook (2003) observed that a notable percentage, approximately 20 to 30%, of university students encounter significant hurdles in acclimatizing to higher education, leading many to discontinue their studies or perform below their potential. In light of these observations, academic adjustment emerges as a pivotal aspect warranting investigation concerning student success (van Rooij et al., 2018).

3 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This research paper investigates the motivations behind the selection of geography as a field of study and explores the career aspirations of prospective graduates and postgraduates enrolled at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana in response to the aforementioned key issues.

The study comprises five distinct sections. The initial segment compiles fundamental information about the students, delving into the primary factors influencing their choice of the geography study programme, and assesses their overall satisfaction with the academic pursuit. The second part concentrates on the skills and competence acquired during their years of study. In the third section, students' perspectives regarding their potential roles as geography teachers, the compensation they anticipate, and the level of respect accorded to educators in our society are examined. The fourth section explores the aspirations students hold after completing their education, while the concluding section gauges their contentment with the chosen study programme and evaluates their financial circumstances.

Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire administered in 2017 and 2020, involving a total of 155 students in their first year of the first cycle (bachelor's degree programme), and the first and second years of the second cycle (master's degree programme). This study employed a quantitative-empirical approach, employing an online survey as the data collection instrument. Subsequently, the gathered data was subjected to statistical analysis using Excel and SPSS 26. Various statistical tests such as the Pearson Chi-Square test, Symmetric Measures test, Phi Coefficient, Cramer's V, and Contingency Coefficient were employed to assess the significance and strength of correlations within the dataset.

In summary, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of geography education and the aspirations of geography students at the University of Ljubljana, shedding light on their motivations, skills development, career prospects, and overall satisfaction with their academic journey.

The survey encompassed a total of thirty-seven questions, comprising closed and semi-closed (short answer) queries. It is important to note that not all of these questions are incorporated into this study. In both years, all students in the first year of their first cycle and the first and second years of their second cycle were invited to partake in the survey, which was administered both orally and through e-classrooms. Importantly, all questions were optional, which may explain variations in the number of responses for each individual question.

The primary objectives of the research revolved around addressing the following key inquiries:

1. What motivated students to select geography as their field of study?
2. To what extent are students satisfied with their higher geography education?
3. What skills and competence do students acquire during their geography studies?
4. What is the students' perception of the teaching profession?
5. What are the career aspirations of the students?
6. How familiar are students with job opportunities, employer expectations, and requirements?
7. What strategies will students employ in their job search?
8. How would students decide if they were to choose their course of study again?

This comprehensive survey aimed to illuminate various facets of students' academic experiences, career aspirations, and future prospects in the field of geography.

Structurally, the questionnaire was organized into six distinct domains of inquiry, encompassing a combination of closed, mixed, and open-ended responses. These areas of investigation were designed to probe:

1. The extent of participants' awareness regarding the role and significance of geography in society.
2. The perceived importance of geography as an academic discipline within the contemporary education system.

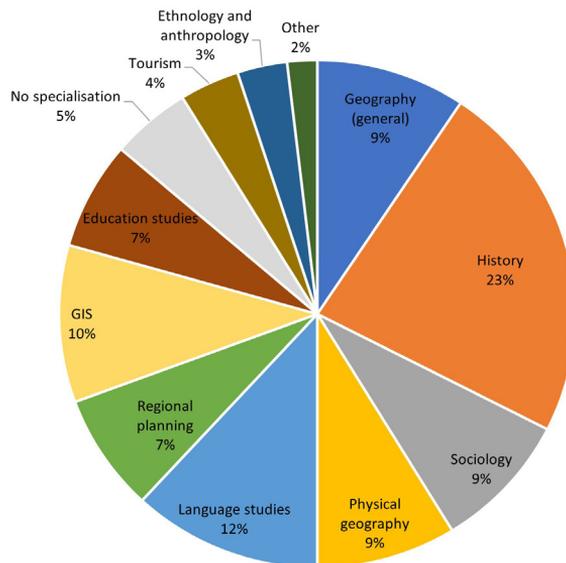
3. The allocation of geography hours in the weekly curriculum.
4. The participants' perceptions concerning the potential for a successful career pathway through the pursuit of geography studies.
5. An exploration of the employment opportunities available in the labour market for graduates and postgraduates in geography.
6. Identifying potential strategies to enhance the public perception of geography within society.

Additionally, the questionnaire included sections for capturing socio-demographic data, such as gender, age, and place of residence, to offer a comprehensive perspective on the participants' backgrounds and viewpoints.

4 RESULTS

A total of 194 geography students responded to the online survey, but as mentioned earlier, not all of them answered all questions. Therefore, only 155 respondents who answered the questionnaire in full were included in the analysis. 83 of the students were female, and 72 were male. The average age of the respondents was 22.4 years. Most of the respondents were undergraduate students (84). The majority (62%) of the students were double majors, while the others were single majors.

Figure 1: Geography students' specialisation (single majors) or study programme beside Geography (double majors).

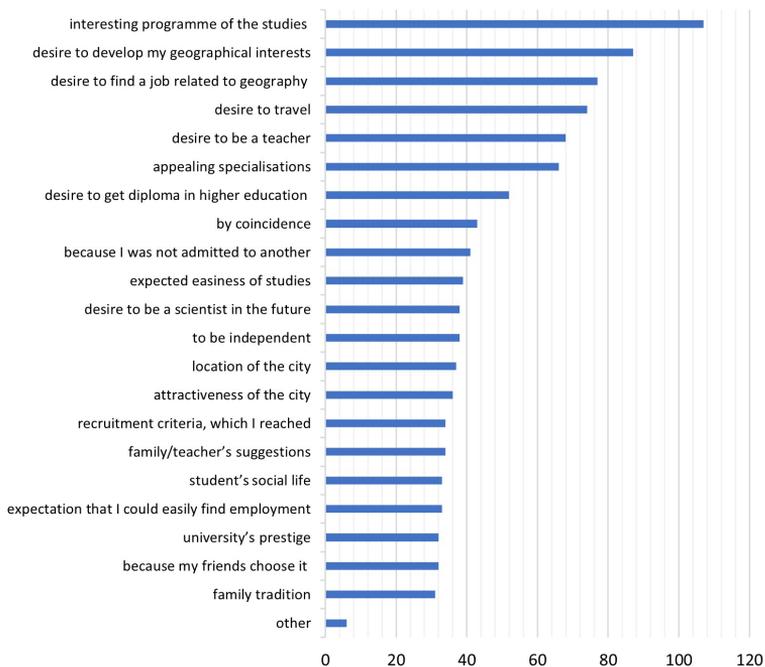


When asked to indicate their preferred specialisation (Figure 1) the responses of students studying two programmes (geography plus e.g., history, sociology, foreign language etc.) were mostly related to their second field of study. Their preferred specialisation is history (23%), which is also the most common combination of double majors. Various language studies (e.g., Spanish, English, Slovenian...) ranked second (12%), and sociology ranked third (9%). The responses of students with a single major were more diverse. At the undergraduate level, students have only general geography subjects, most of which are obligatory. When they enrol in the second cycle, they choose the modules they prefer. Most responses were related to GIS (10%), which is a strength of students with a single major. Physical geography was second (9%), and regional planning was third (7%).

Main reasons for choosing geography study programme

The respondents were asked to give three main reasons for choosing to study geography. The three reasons chosen were ranked by the students from most important to least important. The Figure 2 shows only the number of times the reason was mentioned, not the importance of each reason.

Figure 2: Main reasons for choosing geography study programme.



The most important reason is the interesting study programme, which received 55 first place votes and a total of 107 votes. Because the survey did not request explanations for the provided reason, we lack insight into the origins of their knowledge about the study programme (e.g. getting to know the studies during their schooling). The desire to develop my geographical interests came in second. 47 students chose it as the most important reason, and 40 chose it as the second or third reason. Appealing specialisations was the third most popular first place answer (27), but overall, it is in fifth place because it was not often selected as a second (26) or third option (13). Overall, the third most popular reason was the desire to find a job related to geography, which received 25 first-place votes. Nonetheless, the rationales underlying students' decisions to pursue geography studies prompt some concern. Notably, there exists a significant inclination towards a desire for travel, which can inadvertently link the study of geography with tourism-focused travel, leading to subsequent disillusionment. Moreover, reasons expressed such as 'random chance', 'simplicity of the programme', 'attraction to the urban environment' (presumably Ljubljana), and 'peer influence' are puzzling due to their lack of substantive justification and failure to meet professional standards.

Level of satisfaction with studying geography

There are several students who studied for several years and then abandoned their studies. The respondents were asked if they had ever thought of dropping out of their studies (Figure 3). Most of them (58%) have never thought about dropping out of their studies, while 24% have done so once. 18% have even considered it several times. Most of them had problems with one or two geography subjects in the first year of study or found that the geography course did not meet their expectations.

Figure 3: Level of tendency to stop studying geography.

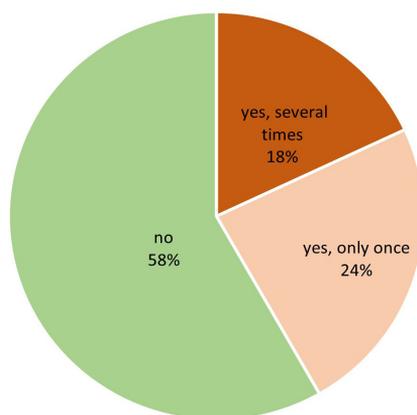
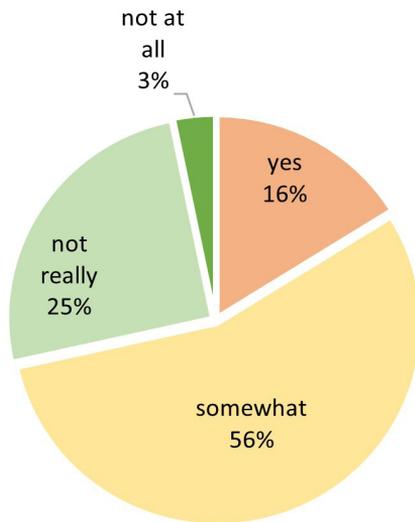


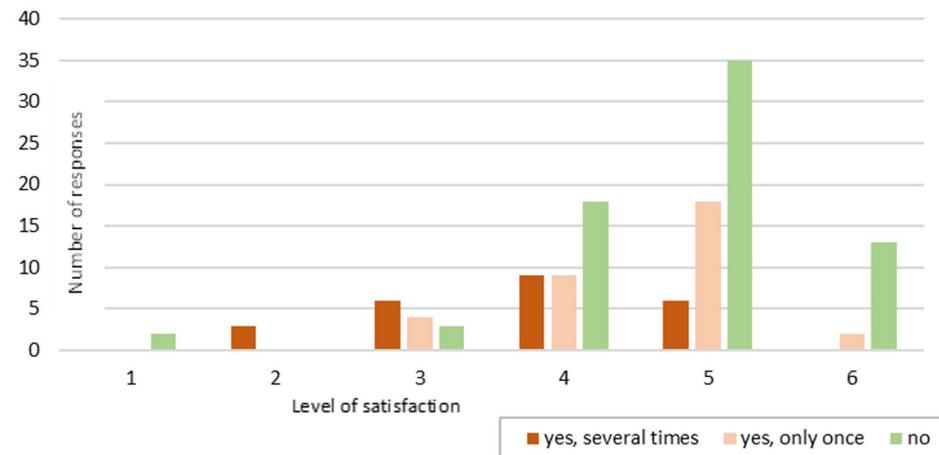
Figure 4: Level of difficulty of studying geography.



A portion of the students perceives geography as excessively scientific and rigorous. This sentiment is underscored by the data presented in Figure 4, revealing that merely a quarter of students do not regard the geography programme as challenging. Specifically, 16% view the study of geography as arduous, while a significant majority, comprising 56%, consider it to be somewhat demanding. Among these students, there are instances where individuals who briefly contemplated abandoning their studies at the first cycle level encountered doubts when considering pursuing further education in geography at the second cycle level.

Figure 5 shows a connection between the level of satisfaction and consideration of giving up on their studies. It is clearly visible that most students, that never considered dropping out, are also satisfied with their studies. Even students who were thinking of dropping out are somewhat satisfied with the study although they are rarely fully satisfied.

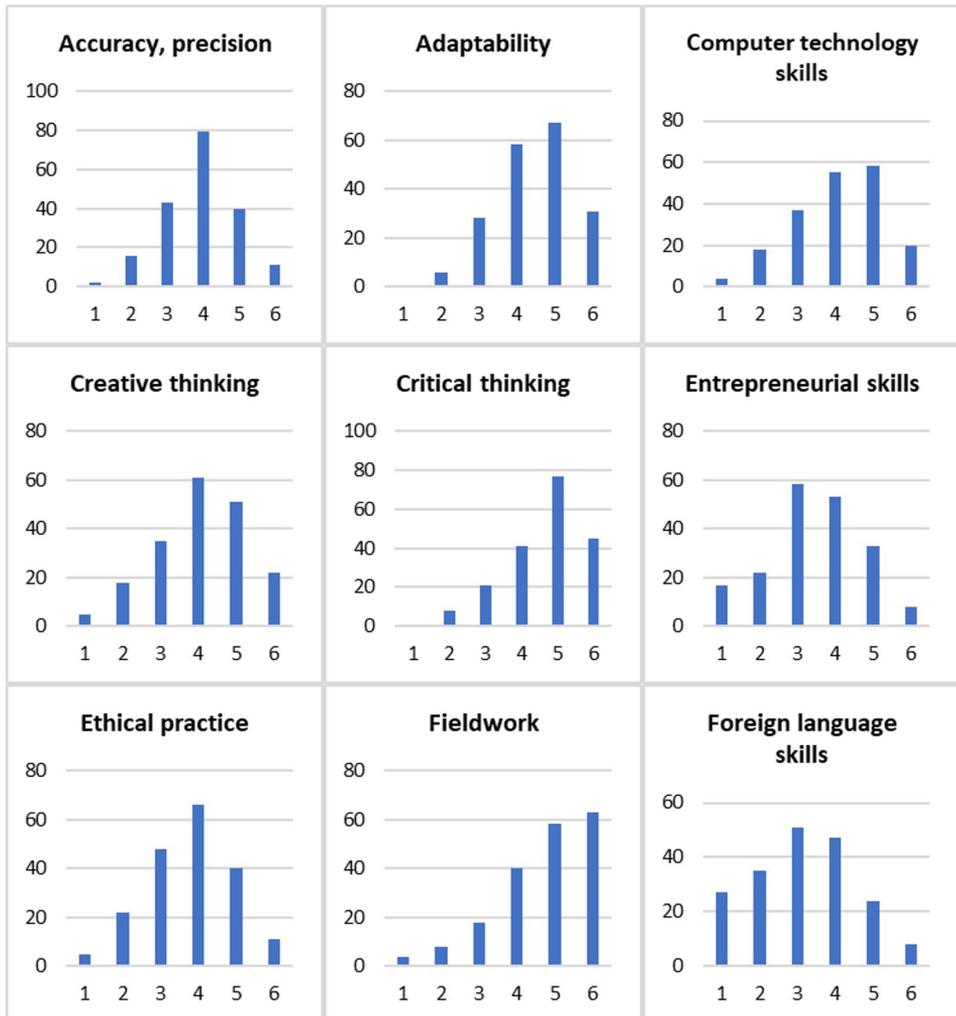
Figure 5: Level of satisfaction from 1 to 6 in choosing to study geography in connection with tendency to stop studying geography.



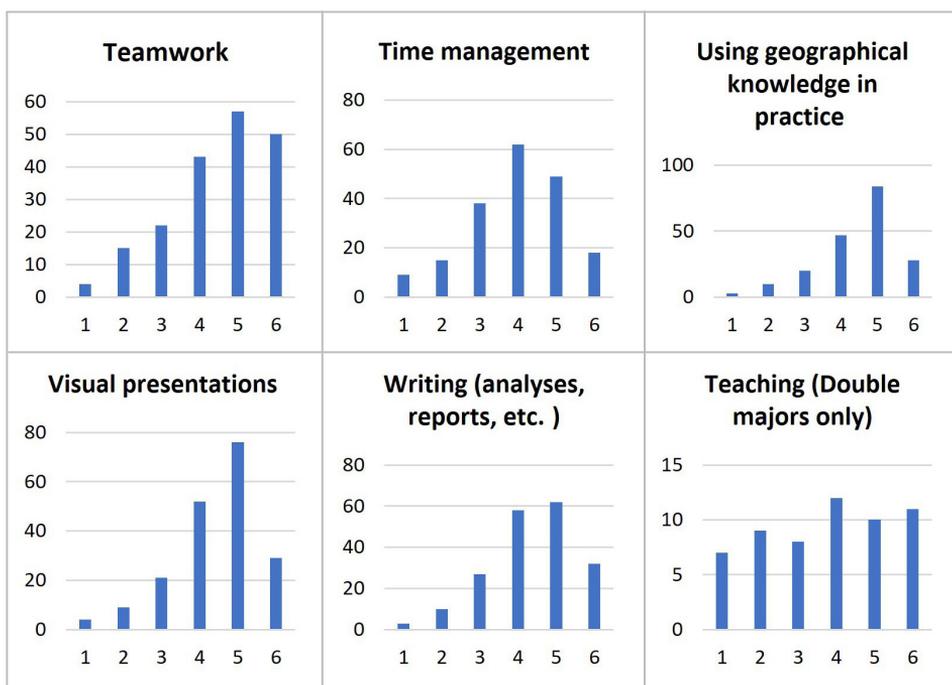
Skills and competence

Students were tasked with assessing the proficiency levels of various skills and competence acquired throughout their geography studies on a scale of 1–6 (1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest), as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: The skills and competence acquired in the course of studying geography.





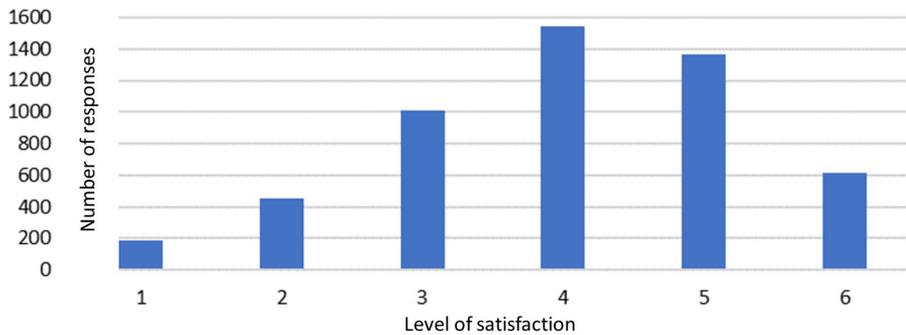


The majority of these skills and competence garnered ratings at levels 4 or 5. Unsurprisingly, fieldwork received the highest rating at level 6, aligning with the expectation since most geography courses necessitate at least one day of fieldwork per semester. Courses with a greater focus on fieldwork, such as “Physical geography of karst,” entail several days of practical fieldwork. The second highest-rated competence was the application of geographic knowledge in real-world contexts. Other competence, including public speaking, teamwork, visual presentations, writing, critical thinking, and adaptability, also emerged as highly ranked.

It is essential to note that the teaching results presented pertain exclusively to double major students who earn a geography teaching certificate upon completing their second cycle. These findings reveal a diverse range of responses concerning the acquisition of teaching-related skills and competence. Notably, the lowest-rated skills and competence include foreign language proficiency and entrepreneurial skills.

Figure 7 provides a comprehensive overview of the collective skills and competence acquired during the course of their studies. On average, these proficiencies are rated at level 4, with level 5 being the second most frequently observed rating. This suggests that students believe they have made progress in enhancing their skills and competence through their geography education, although there is a prevailing sentiment that further improvements are both possible and desirable.

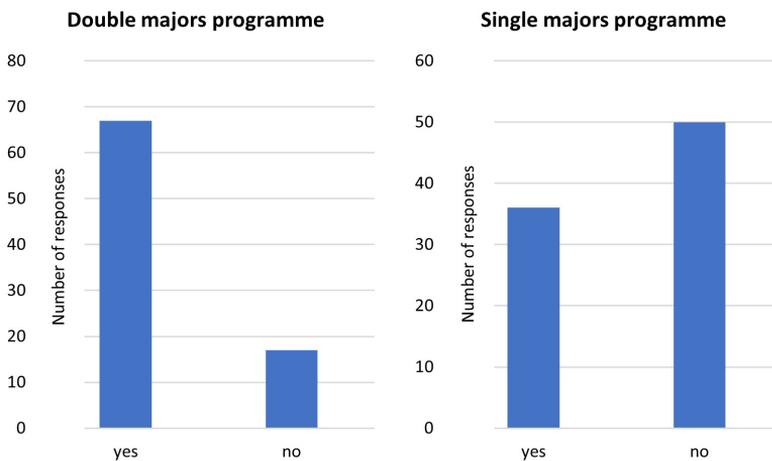
Figure 7: The sum of all skills and competence acquired while studying geography.



To be or not to be a teacher?

Given the absence of prior research in Slovenia regarding the awareness of potential career prospects associated with a geography degree, beyond the well-established teaching profession, our study sought to investigate this unexplored area. Additionally, our research aimed to delve into the aspirations of prospective geography teachers. To achieve this, we inquired whether students, including both single-subject and double-subject students, harboured an interest in pursuing a career as geography teachers. It's worth noting that double-subject students typically engage in the study of two subjects to fulfil the requirements for obtaining a teaching certificate.

Figure 8: Aspiration to work in the teaching profession.

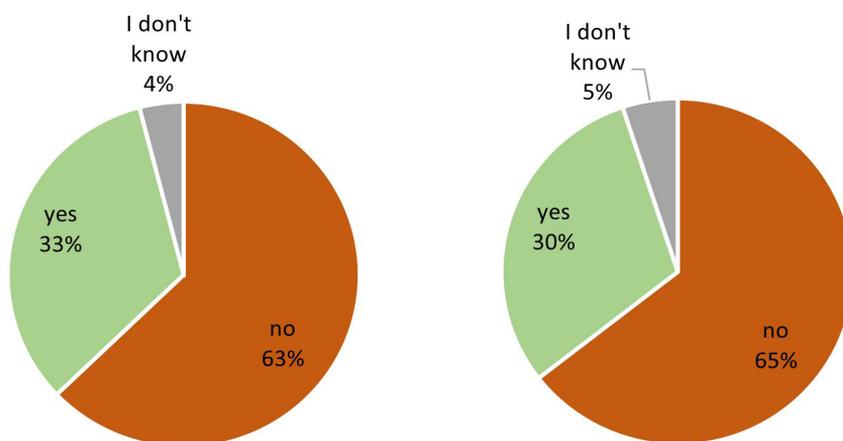


Evidently, a significant proportion of students aspire to pursue a career as educators. Many have expressed their preference for the study of geography with the intent of becoming teachers, driven by a genuine passion for working with children and sharing knowledge. Notably, approximately 20% of the double-subject students who participated in our survey harbour no inclination toward teaching; their choice of a double-subject programme primarily stems from their desire to study two different subjects rather than seeking a teaching qualification. In contrast, single-subject students, who do not automatically receive a teaching degree upon completing their second cycle, exhibit a substantial interest in the teaching profession, with 42% expressing the desire to become geography teachers one day. This underscores the importance of considering the inclusion of a single-subject pedagogical degree programme.

Over the past few decades, there has been a noticeable decline in the reputation of the teaching profession, as mirrored in the responses of the survey participants. Students have articulated concerns about the inadequacy of teachers' salaries in relation to the demands of the profession. While some acknowledge a lack of specific knowledge regarding the average salaries of educators, there is a prevailing perception that teachers are generally underpaid. In addition, a significant portion of the students share the belief that teachers no longer receive the level of respect they deserve, and that the teaching profession has lost some of the prestige it once enjoyed.

Students were also asked about their thoughts on teacher's salary and respect for teachers in society (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Opinion on the appropriateness of teachers' salaries and on respect for teachers in society.



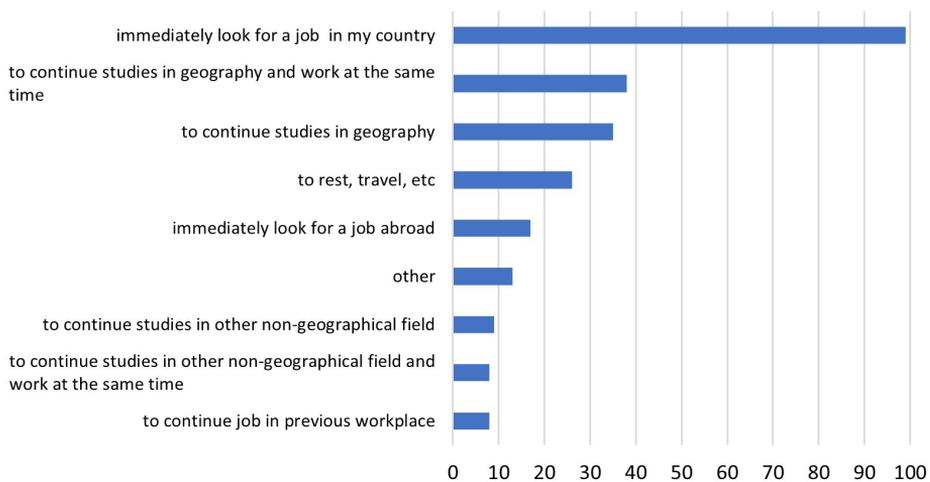
Although the respect for a profession is not solely determined by salary we nevertheless measured the correlation between their thoughts on teacher's salary and respect. We calculated the Pearson Chi-Square test, which shows the significance of correlation. We removed the categories "I don't know". The correlation values indicate that a correlation exists, since the significance values are less than 0.05. We can except the Chi-Square test since 0 cells have an expected count less than 5.

The Symmetric Measures test which indicates whether the correlation is strong and the Phi Coefficient which is used only for 2x2 tables were also done. The values are between -1 and 1 , where 0 indicates a weak correlation. Since the value is 0.576 , we can assume that the existing correlation is somewhat strong. This is also indicated by Cramer's V and Contingency Coefficient values.

Students' career aspirations

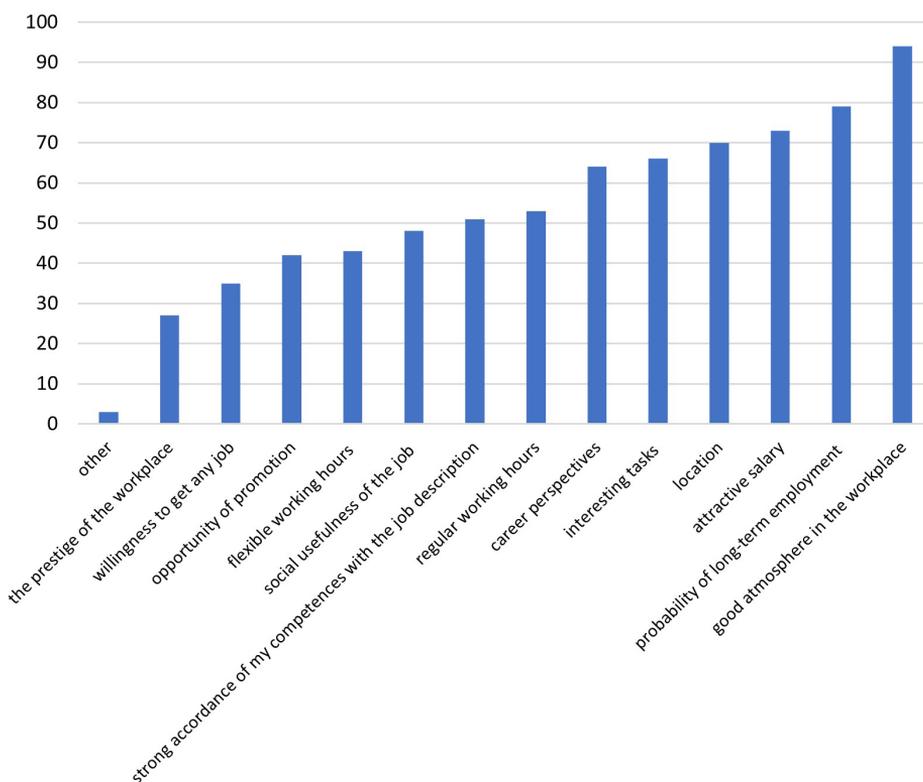
Regarding their future aspirations and plans (Figure 10) the majority of respondents will immediately look for a job in Slovenia. The undergraduate students will continue their geography studies, and some of them will work at the same time. A small percentage of students (4%) already have a job where they will continue to work after graduation. About 9% of students will continue their studies in subjects other than geography. 9% of students will look for a job abroad, while 14% will take time off to relax or travel.

Figure 10: Students' plans after graduation.



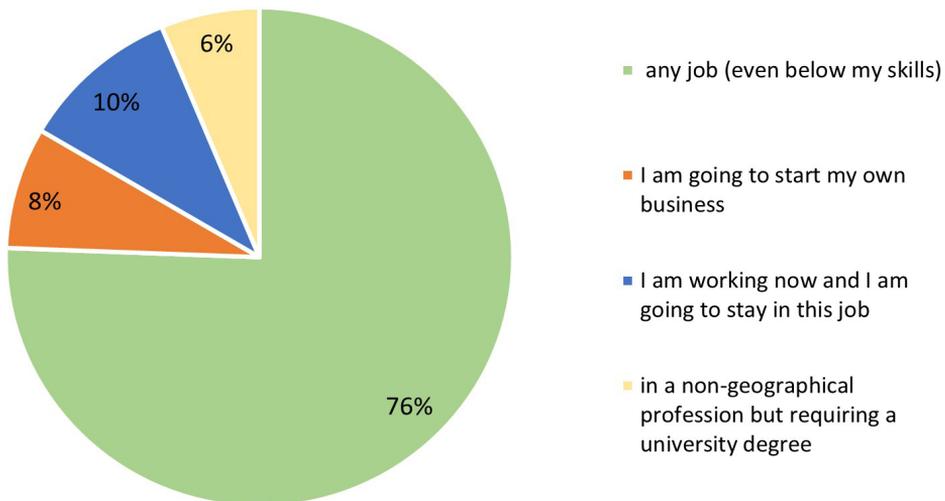
The respondents were then asked to rank up to 3 criteria they would use when choosing a job after graduation. The Figure 11 shows only how often the criterion was selected, but not how important each criterion is. Good atmosphere in the workplace got the most first-place votes (36) and ranked first when all votes were counted (94). Probability of long-term employment came in second in first-place votes (35) and overall (79). Interesting tasks received the third highest number of first placed votes (34) but ranked fifth overall (66). The third highest overall criterion is an attractive salary (73), but it received only 16 first-place votes, suggesting that while an attractive salary is very important in the job search, it is rarely the most important factor. Flexible working hours (10), opportunity of promotion (6), and job prestige (5) accounted for the lowest number of first placed votes. Willingness to accept any job was also ranked as one of the least important criteria (35 total votes).

Figure 11: What to consider when looking for a job.



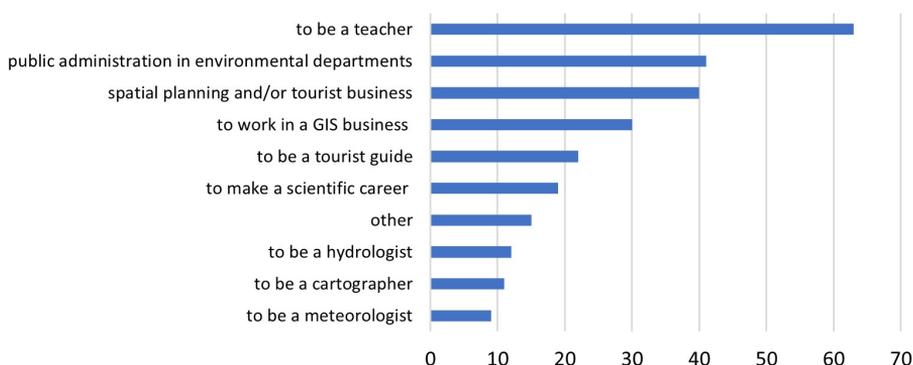
Although willingness to take any job was ranked as one of the least important criteria in the post-graduation job search, Figure 12 shows that geography students are willing to take any job, even if it is below their skills/competence level. Three-quarters of respondents are willing to take any job as their first job. 10% of students already have a job in which they will continue to work after graduation. 8% plan to start their own business. These businesses will be in GIS, tourism, agriculture, fashion and sports. 6% will graduate only to obtain a diploma in higher education and work in a non-geographic area that requires a university education.

Figure 12: Students' plans after graduation.



Students were presented with a list of professions and were tasked with indicating whether they would actively seek employment in those respective fields. The data reveals that 38% of the students expressed an interest in pursuing a career in education, while 25% expressed a desire to work in the environmental departments of public administration. Furthermore, 24% of the students expressed a preference for working in tourism and/or companies specializing in spatial planning. Conversely, professions such as meteorology, cartography, and hydrology appear to be the least favoured, implying a lower inclination among students to seek specialized roles in these fields, as indicated in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Professions in which students would seek employment.



Employers and young people's approach to finding a job

Students were requested to identify the criteria they believed employers consider when evaluating job applicants. They were allowed to select up to three criteria that they deemed most crucial in the hiring process. The Figure 14 indicates the frequency with which each criterion was chosen but does not provide insights into the relative importance of each. Notably, the most chosen criterion was previous work experience, garnering 60 first-place selections and a total of 119 votes. A diploma in higher education emerged as the second most frequently chosen criterion, earning 50 first-place votes and a total of 90 votes. Surprisingly, the personality of the candidate, while receiving only 23 first-place votes, ranked equally with the diploma in higher education in terms of total votes, accumulating 90 votes. Geographical skills were rated as the third most important attribute, earning 37 first-place votes and ranking fourth in terms of total votes with 82 selections.

Students and recent graduates take different approaches to job search. Respondents were asked to rank three approaches to job search. The chart again shows the total number of votes (Figure 15). Direct contact with the employer (visit or phone call) was the most common approach, with 94 first-place votes and 138 total votes. Personal or professional contact was second in first place votes (33) and second in total (94). Public employment agencies ranked third (83) and gained 25 first place votes.

Figure 14: What students think employers pay most attention to when recruiting.

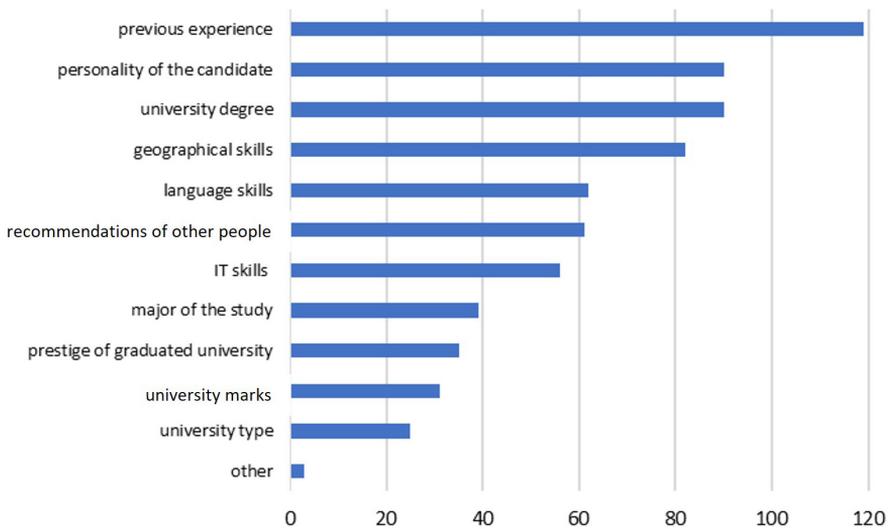
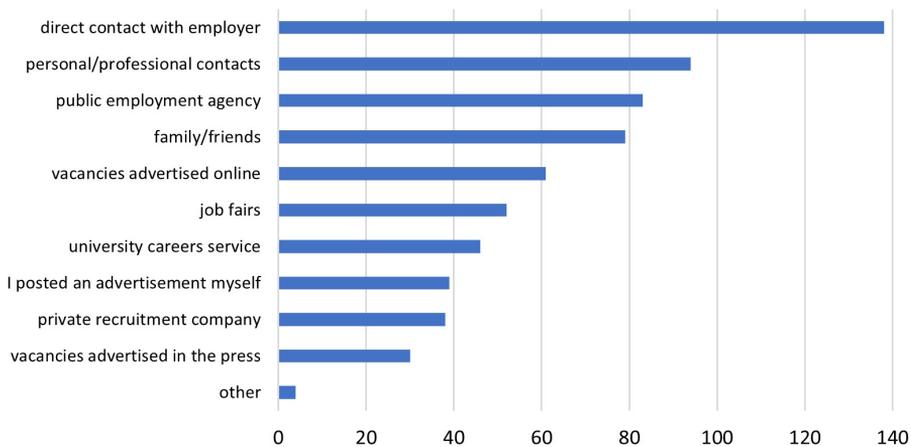
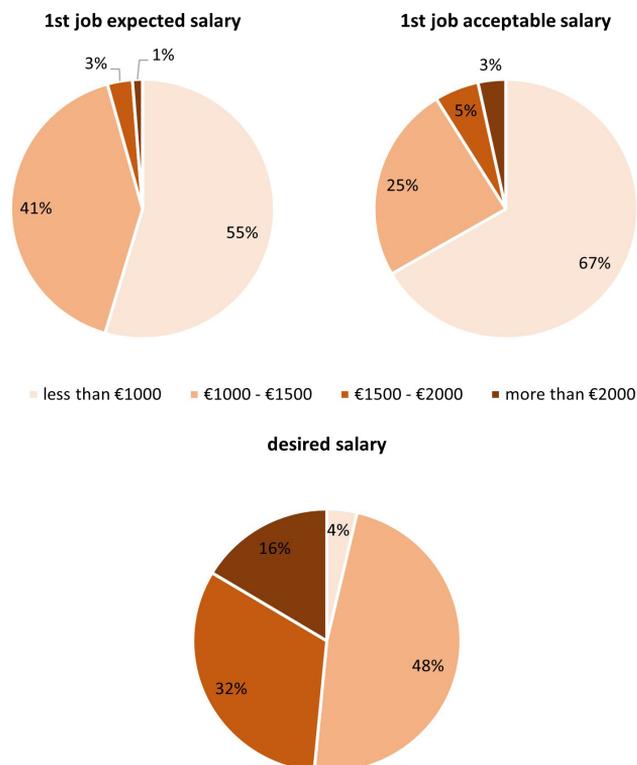


Figure 15: Ways of finding a job.



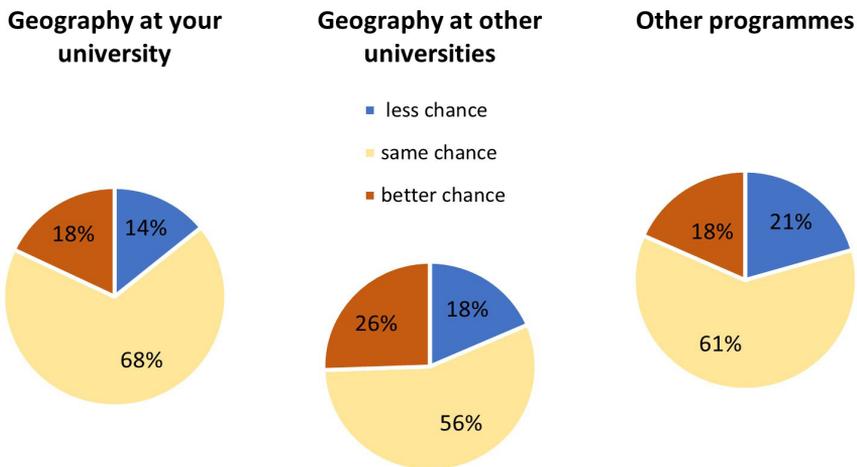
Survey participants were requested to provide estimations of their anticipated first salary, the minimum acceptable salary for their initial job, and their desired income, all measured in euros. This survey was conducted in both 2017 and 2020, with values adjusted to account for a 10% inflation rate. It's noteworthy that the average net salary in Slovenia stands at €1417.69 as of 2023 (according to SURS). The pie charts illuminate the expectations of respondents regarding their first salary, revealing that the majority anticipate receiving compensation below the national average. Specifically, more than half foresee earning less than €1000, with only 4% anticipating a starting salary exceeding €1500. Interestingly, a significant portion, approximately two-thirds of the participants, indicate a willingness to accept a salary below €1000 for their initial employment. About 25% express contentment with a salary in the range of €1000 to €1500, while 8% insist on a job that offers a compensation exceeding €1500. The landscape shifts when considering income aspirations, as a mere 4% aspire to earn €1000 or less. Approximately half aim to achieve earnings between €1000 and €1500, one-third set their sights on an income ranging from €1500 to €2000, and 16% harbour ambitions of earning more than that.

Figure 16: Students' expectations regarding their earnings.



Students estimated their chances of finding a job compared to other graduates. About two-thirds of the students believe that they have the same chances of finding a job compared to graduates of the same university. Only 18% believe they have a better chance. When students were asked to compare themselves to graduates from other universities, the number of students who believe they have better chances increased to 26%. The “less chance” category also increased by about 4%. About half believe that opportunities are equal and that it does not matter which university the graduate comes from. Compared to other majors, the number of students who believe they have lower opportunities exceeds the number of students who believe they have higher opportunities by 3%. 61% of all students believe they have the same employment opportunities as graduates of other programmes.

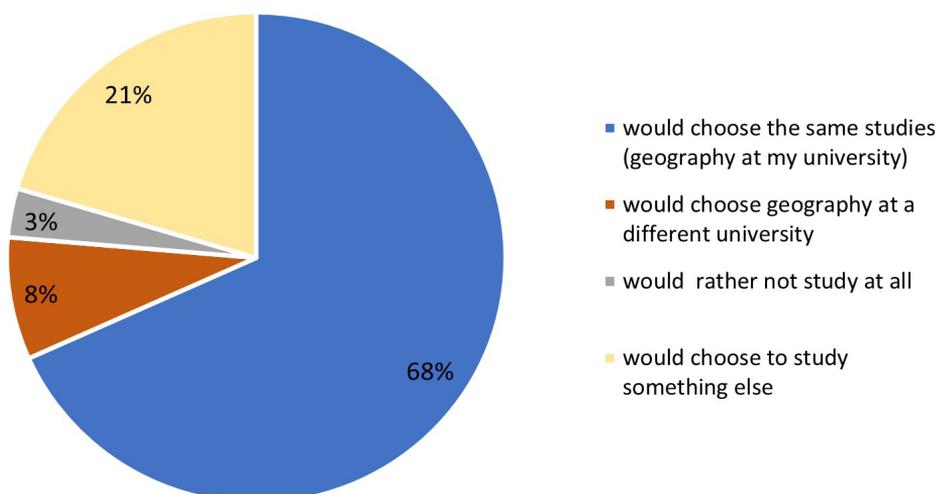
Figure 17: Students' estimation to find a job in comparison to other graduates.



If students were to decide again ...

The results show that students are generally satisfied with their studies. 68% of students would not change their choice of study. Surprisingly, 21% would choose a completely different course of study. In most cases, their subject of study would still be related to geography (e.g., tourism or geology) or computer science, or they would change from a double major to a single major, or vice versa. 8% would continue to study geography, just not in Ljubljana. Only 3% would prefer not to study at all.

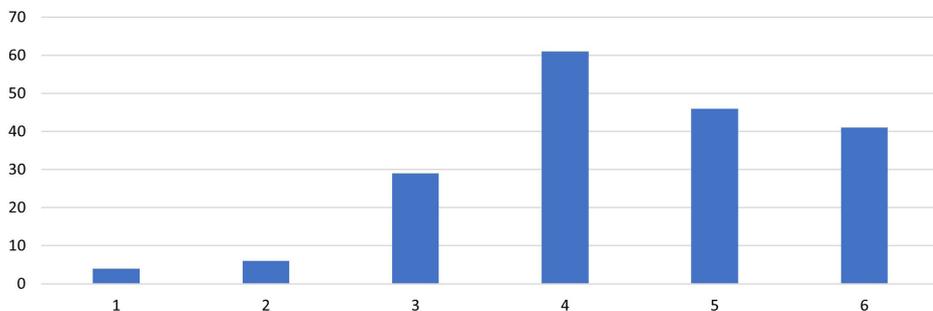
Figure 18: The decision for a study programme if students were to do it again.



Students were also invited to share their perspectives on how to enhance their programme and make it more valuable. The most frequent suggestions centred on increasing opportunities for fieldwork and hands-on experiences. Students expressed a desire for a broader range of subjects related to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and a preference for curricula that are more application oriented.

Moreover, students generally held a positive view of studying geography and would readily recommend it to aspiring young learners. A substantial 33% of students rated their recommendation at level 4, while a significant 79% fell within the range of level 4 to level 6 (Figure 19). They found the programme exceptionally engaging, practically applicable to daily life, and highlighted its unique ability to provide a wide perspective not found in other disciplines. They would encourage young people who have a passion for traveling, exploring the world, immersing themselves in diverse cultures, and spending time outdoors to pursue geography studies. In their view, studying geography fosters a deeper comprehension of the surrounding world. Only a minority, constituting 5%, leaned towards level 1 or level 2, indicating a somewhat moderate level of interest. The primary concern expressed by this group was the limited job opportunities for geographers, rather than the subject's intrinsic appeal.

Figure 19: To study or not to study geography – students' choice.



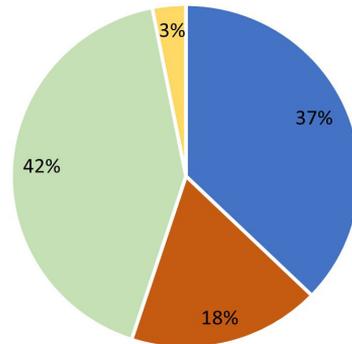
We analysed the correlation between students who were satisfied with the selection of their study and if they would also recommend it to young people. For this purpose, we calculated the Pearson Chi-Square test, which shows the significance of correlation. Because of small number of cases in some categories, we merged the first three categories into one, Level 4 was its own category, while levels 5 and 6 were also merged. There is an existing correlation between satisfaction and advising young people to study geography, as the Asymptotic Significance is below the 0.05 threshold. Less than 20% of cells have an expected count less than 5, which is necessary if we want to accept the Chi-Square test. The symmetric measures test shows the strength of the correlation between variables, the greater the value, the stronger the correlation. Values are on a scale from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates a very strong correlation. The values of Cramer's V and Contingency Coefficient show that the correlation is somewhat strong and significant.

While public education in Slovenia is offered without tuition fees, there are still financial implications associated with pursuing higher education. Students hailing from locations outside Ljubljana and its vicinity often find themselves responsible for covering housing expenses throughout the academic year. Geography students, in particular, face higher costs compared to the average student in Ljubljana due to the essential component of fieldwork in their curriculum. Fieldwork stands out as one of the most critical skills acquired in the study of geography, as highlighted earlier, and students overwhelmingly perceive it as such. Although fieldwork is mandatory for all geography students, it necessitates an added financial commitment.

To meet these supplementary expenses (Figure 20), students predominantly rely on financial support from their families, constituting 42% of the source of funding. Approximately 37% of students adopt a dual approach, balancing work commitments alongside their studies to manage their costs. Furthermore, 18% of students receive scholarships to alleviate the financial burden associated with their education.

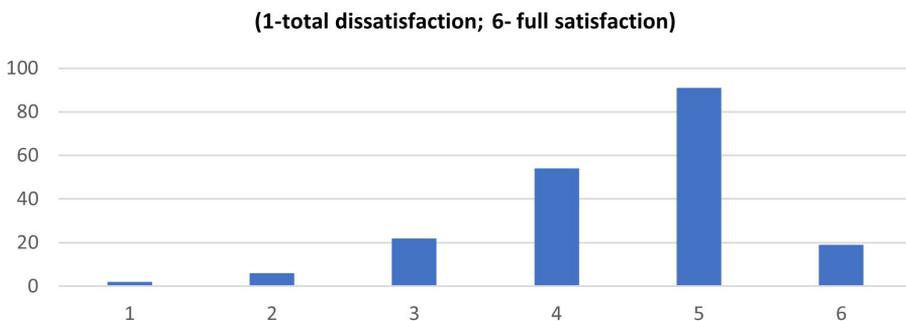
Figure 20: Covering subsistence cost during study.

■ by working and studying at the same time ■ by scholarship ■ from parents/family ■ other



In summary, students generally express a notable level of contentment with their choice of pursuing a geography major, as indicated in Figure 21. The average satisfaction rating stands at 4.5, with a significant 41% of students opting for level 5, while only 9% report being entirely satisfied with their choice. Notably, a mere 1% expressed complete dissatisfaction with the study of geography but did not provide specific feedback.

Figure 21: Students' satisfaction with their choice of study.



5 DISCUSSION

The data provided paints a compelling picture of the factors that influence students' decisions regarding their academic pursuits and future career aspirations. It is evident that the study programme itself plays a pivotal role in shaping their choices, with 55 first-place votes and a total of 107 votes highlighting its significance. The desire to nurture geographical interests closely follows as the second most important factor, with 47 students regarding it as their primary motivation. This suggests that a stimulating and engaging curriculum is a key driver of student satisfaction and persistence in their studies.

Furthermore, the data underscores the strong correlation between students' satisfaction with their studies and their intentions to persist. Even those students who contemplated dropping out appear to be somewhat satisfied with their academic experiences, emphasizing the value of a fulfilling education in retaining students. But nevertheless, the fact that 21% of students would opt for an entirely different course of study is concerning. This percentage is notably high and warrants further investigation.

The assessment of skills and competence acquired during the geography programme reveals an overall high level of competence, with fieldwork, a core component of geography courses, rating at the highest level. This not only reaffirms the programme's effectiveness but also underscores the practicality of the curriculum in preparing students for real-world applications.

The data on teaching skills and competence highlights the diversity of responses, with some skills rating higher than others. Notably, foreign language and entrepreneurial skills appear to be areas where students feel less prepared, indicating potential areas for improvement in the curriculum.

In terms of future aspirations, the majority of students express a desire to stay in Slovenia, with a significant portion planning to seek employment immediately. This speaks to the programme's perceived value in the local job market and the importance of geographic education in students' career prospects.

Lastly, when it comes to factors influencing students' job choices, a positive workplace atmosphere, the prospect of long-term employment, and interesting tasks emerge as top priorities. An attractive salary is deemed important but rarely the primary factor in job selection, indicating that students prioritize job satisfaction and work environment alongside financial considerations. But although the esteem for a profession is not exclusively dictated by salary, findings substantiate a correlation between teacher remuneration and the level of respect accorded to the teaching vocation.

In sum, this data underscores the importance of a stimulating curriculum, practical skill development, and favourable work conditions in shaping students' academic and career decisions. It also highlights the challenges facing the teaching profession, suggesting a need for improvements in salary and prestige to attract and retain quality educators.

The provided data sheds light on the priorities and expectations of geography students in terms of their career prospects and job choices. It is noteworthy that flexible working hours, opportunities for promotion, and job prestige received the fewest first-place votes, indicating that these factors may not be the primary drivers in their job search. Moreover, the willingness of geography students to accept any job, even if it is below their skill and competence level, is a significant finding. A substantial 75% of respondents express their willingness to take any job as their first job, potentially reflecting the competitive job market or the flexibility of geography graduates to adapt to different roles.

The data also offers insights into the specific career paths that geography students aspire to pursue. A significant proportion expresses interest in teaching jobs, public administration roles in environmental departments, and positions in tourism companies. These preferences align with the knowledge and skills acquired during their geography studies, underlining the programme's relevance to their career aspirations. But it is also concerning that a significant number of students perceive geography as merely a tool for understanding the world during travel, rather than recognizing its potential for a professional career. It seems they have not fully grasped the diverse opportunities available through the study and application of geography.

Regarding the attributes that matter most in their job search, previous experience tops the list, followed closely by a diploma in higher education. This suggests that practical experience and educational qualifications hold great importance for these students. Personality is also considered a significant factor, indicating the importance of soft skills in the job market.

The data on salary expectations is particularly revealing. The majority of students expect a starting salary below €1000, with only a small fraction anticipating a higher income. This data implies that geography students may have relatively modest salary expectations upon entering the job market, possibly influenced by a perceived lack of high-paying job opportunities in their field.

Furthermore, the findings regarding students' views on job prospects and their commitment to their chosen field of study are crucial. A majority of students believe they have an average chance of finding a job compared to graduates of the same university, suggesting a realistic perspective on their future employment. The fact that 68% would not change their choice of study is indicative of their dedication to geography, while the 21% who would opt for a different course of study may reflect a degree of uncertainty or the desire for alternative career opportunities.

Lastly, the data highlights the financial challenges faced by geography students, particularly those who are not from the Ljubljana area. The need to pay for housing during the year together with the fieldwork costs can significantly increase their overall costs.

In summary, this data provides valuable insights into the mindset and priorities of geography students as they navigate their academic and career paths. It underscores

their adaptability, strong preference for relevant work experience, and potentially modest salary expectations, all of which have implications for educators, employers, and policymakers in the field of geography education and employment. The results will be of great help for the further development of geography study programmes at our faculty, as the knowledge of the factors influencing young people's decisions to study, as well as their career aspirations and expectations, will allow us to understand the low enrolment figures in geography study programmes in recent years and to find potential solutions or a way to improve the current situation.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In the dynamic field of education in Slovenia, where change has been the only constant, it is essential to recognize that not every change is inherently desirable. As Huber aptly noted, the direction of change requires collective agreement, and active participation is crucial to shape the change that aligns with our educational goals (Huber, 2011). One of the pressing challenges that this data highlights is the need to challenge the misconception that geography lacks identity and is merely a repository of general knowledge about the world's facts and features, as suggested by Israr-ud-Din (1991). To ensure the relevance of geography as a science subject, it is imperative to keep its curricula up to date with the ever-evolving scientific landscape, as pointed out by Khan (1991). This is especially crucial as geographers possess specialized skills in areas such as surveying, cartography, GIS, and environmental protection, which have not been fully utilized, leading to unemployment among geography graduates.

The decline in the number of students studying geography is a concerning trend, particularly in an era where global issues like climate change and biodiversity demand geographical perspectives. Understanding the demographics of geography students is a vital step in revitalizing the discipline and changing perceptions of its value. The data presented, encompassing a range of quantitative sources, suggests that there is hope for a resurgence in geography study in Slovenia. This also calls for proactive engagement with potential employers, as comprehending their expectations enables continual improvements to the study curriculum.

In conclusion, it is evident that the field of geography is at a critical juncture, where active efforts are needed to reshape perceptions and promote its importance. The challenge for the broader community of professional geographers is to collaboratively work towards improving the current situation. By dispelling misconceptions about geography and advocating for its relevance in addressing pressing global challenges, geography can regain its identity and secure its position as a vital discipline in the realm of education and beyond.

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ODLOČITEV ZA ŠTUDIJ GEOGRAFIJE TER POKLICNE ASPIRACIJE BODOČIH DIPLOMANTOV IN MAGISTRANTOV

Povzetek

Na odločitev mladostnika za določen študij zagotovo vplivajo številni dejavniki, med katerimi lahko izpostavimo predvsem njegove interese in predanost nečemu, sposobnosti in veščine, karierni možnosti, družinska pričakovanja, socialni pritisk in vpliv vrstnikov, informacije, ki so mu na voljo, in svetovanje, ki ga je deležen, ter, nazadnje, finančne omejitve. Z namenom ugotoviti, kaj vse botruje odločitvi mladostnikov za študij geografije in kakšne so poklicne aspiracije bodočih diplomantov in magistrantov, smo leta 2017 in 2020 na Oddelku za geografijo FF UL izvedli raziskavo, v kateri je skupno sodelovalo 155 študentov prvih letnikov prve in druge stopnje ter drugih letnikov druge stopnje.

Pridobljeni podatki izkazujejo prepričljiv nabor dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na odločitve študentov glede njihovega študijskega udejstvovanja in prihodnjih poklicnih prizadevanj. Očitno je, da ima sam študijski program ključno vlogo pri njihovi izbiri, saj je njegov pomen poudarilo 55 sodelujočih, ki ga je umestilo na prvo mesto, skupno pa ga je omenilo 107 sodelujočih. Želja po razvijanju geografskih interesov je na drugem mestu po pomembnosti, saj jo je 47 študentov označilo za glavno motivacijo. To kaže, da je spodbuden in zanimiv študijski program ključni dejavnik zadovoljstva študentov in njihove vztrajnosti pri študiju. Poleg tega podatki kažejo, da obstaja močna povezava med zadovoljstvom študentov s študijem in njihovimi nameni, da bodo vztrajali. Zdi se, da so celo tisti študenti, ki so razmišljali o prekinitvi študija, vsaj deloma zadovoljni s svojimi študijskimi izkušnjami, kar poudarja vrednost izpolnjujočega izobraževanja pri ohranjanju študentov. Kljub temu pa je zaskrbljujoče dejstvo, da bi se 21 % študentov odločilo za povsem drugačen študij. Ker je delež izrazito visok, bi tovrstno težnjo študentov kazalo natančneje nasloviti.

Ocena spretnosti in kompetenc, pridobljenih med študijem geografije, kaže na splošno visoko raven pridobljenih kompetenc, pri čemer je terensko delo, ki je med osrednjimi deli študijskega programa, ocenjeno na najvišji ravni. To ne samo potrjuje učinkovitost programa, ampak tudi poudarja ustreznost programa pri pripravi študentov na profesionalno pot. Med spretnostmi in kompetencami, ki jih študenti ne dosegajo v zadovoljivi meri, izstopajo tuji jeziki in podjetniške spretnosti oz. kompetence, kar bi v prihodnosti kazalo izboljšati.

Kar zadeva želje in pričakovanja za prihodnost, si večina študentov želi ostati v Sloveniji, velik del pa jih namerava takoj poiskati zaposlitev, kar potrjuje zaznano vrednost programa na domačem trgu dela in pomen geografskega izobraževanja za poklicne možnosti študentov. Med dejavniki, ki vplivajo na izbiro zaposlitve študentov, se kot najpomembnejše prioritete pojavljajo pozitivno vzdušje na delovnem mestu,

možnost dolgoročne zaposlitve in zanimive naloge. Privlačna plača se zdi pomemben, vendar redko glavni dejavnik pri izbiri zaposlitve, kar kaže na to, da študenti poleg finančnih vidikov dajejo prednost zadovoljstvu pri delu in delovnemu okolju. Čeprav spoštovanja poklica ne narekuje izključno plača, pa ugotovitve na področju šolstva potrjujejo povezavo med plačo učiteljev in stopnjo spoštovanja učiteljskega poklica.

Če povzamemo, rezultati raziskave poudarjajo pomen spodbudnega študijskega programa, razvoja praktičnih spretnosti in ugodnih delovnih pogojev pri oblikovanju akademskih in poklicnih odločitev učencev. Opozarjajo tudi na izzive, s katerimi se sooča učiteljski poklic, in nakazujejo potrebo po izboljšanju plač in ugleda za privabljanje in ohranjanje kakovostnih učiteljev.

Rezultati osvetlujejo prednostne naloge visokošolskega študija geografije in pričakovanja študentov geografije glede njihovih poklicnih možnosti in izbire zaposlitve. Omeniti velja, da so prožen delovni čas, možnosti napredovanja in prestiž delovnega mesta prejeli najmanj glasov na prvem mestu, kar kaže na to, da ti dejavniki morda niso ključni pri njihovem iskanju zaposlitve. Poleg tega je pomembna ugotovitev tudi pripravljenost študentov geografije, da sprejmejo katero koli delo, tudi če je pod njihovo ravno znanja in kompetenc. Kar 75 % anketirancev izraža pripravljenost sprejeti katero koli delo kot svojo prvo zaposlitev, kar lahko odraža konkurenčni trg dela ali pripravljenost diplomantov oz. magistrantov geografije, da se prilagodijo različnim vlogam.

Podatki ponujajo tudi vpogled v specifične poklicne poti, ki si jih želijo opravljati študenti geografije. Velik delež jih izraža zanimanje za pedagoški poklic, delovna mesta v javni upravi na okoljskih oddelkih in delovna mesta v turističnih podjetjih. Te želje se ujemajo z znanjem in spretnostmi, ki so jih pridobili med študijem geografije, kar poudarja pomen programa za njihove poklicne želje. Zaskrbljujoče pa je tudi dejstvo, da precejšnje število študentov dojema geografijo zgolj kot orodje za razumevanje sveta med potovanjem, ne pa da bi prepoznali njen potencial za poklicno kariero. Zdi se, da niso v celoti dojeli različnih priložnosti, ki jih ponuja geografija.

Omenimo še lastnosti, ki so po mnenju sodelujočih najpomembnejše pri iskanju zaposlitve. Na vrhu seznama so predhodne izkušnje, takoj za njimi pa je visokošolska diploma, zato lahko sklepamo, da imajo praktične izkušnje in izobrazba za te študente velik pomen. Kot pomemben dejavnik izstopa tudi osebnost posameznika, kar kaže na pomen mehkih veščin na trgu dela. Tudi podatki o pričakovanih plačah so zelo zgovorni. Večina študentov pričakuje začetno plačo pod 1000 EUR, le majhen del pa pričakuje višji dohodek, kar bi bila lahko posledica razmeroma skromnih pričakovanih študentov geografije ob vstopu na trg dela.

Poleg tega so ključne ugotovitve o stališčih študentov glede zaposlitvenih možnosti in njihove zavezanosti izbranemu študijskemu področju. Večina študentov meni, da imajo v primerjavi z diplomanti oz. magistranti iste univerze povprečne možnosti, da najdejo zaposlitev, kar kaže na realističen pogled na njihovo prihodnjo zaposlitev. Dejstvo, da 68 % študentov ne bi spremenilo svoje izbire študija, kaže na njihovo

predanost geografiji, medtem ko 21 % študentov, ki bi se odločili za drugačno študijsko smer, morda odraža stopnjo negotovosti ali željo po alternativnih poklicnih možnostih.

V raziskavi so bili izpostavljeni tudi finančni izzivi, s katerimi se soočajo študenti geografije, zlasti tisti, ki niso iz okolice Ljubljane, saj najemnina skupaj s stroški terenskega dela lahko znatno poveča njihove skupne stroške.

Če povzamemo, pridobljeni podatki zagotavljajo dragocen vpogled v miselnost in razmišljanje študentov geografije, ko krmarijo po svoji študijski in (bodoči) poklicni poti. Poudarjajo njihovo prilagodljivost, veliko naklonjenost ustreznim delovnim izkušnjam in potencialno skromna pričakovanja glede plač, kar vse vpliva na izobraževalce, delodajalce in oblikovalce politike na področju geografskega izobraževanja in zaposlovanja. Rezultati bodo v veliko pomoč pri nadaljnjem razvoju študijskih programov geografije na naši fakulteti, saj nam bo poznavanje dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na odločitev mladih za študij, ter njihovih poklicnih želja in pričakovanj omogočilo razumeti nizke številke vpisa na študijske programe geografije v zadnjih letih in najti morebitne rešitve oziroma način za izboljšanje trenutnega stanja.

Na dinamičnem področju izobraževanja v Sloveniji in širše, kjer so spremembe edina stalnica, se je treba zavedati, da vsaka sprememba ni sama po sebi zaželena. Kot je posrečeno zapisal Huber, je za smer sprememb potreben skupen dogovor, aktivna udeležba pa je ključna za oblikovanje sprememb, ki so skladne z našimi izobraževalnimi cilji (Huber, 2011). Upadanje števila študentov, ki študirajo geografijo, je zaskrbljujoč trend, zlasti v času, ko globalna vprašanja, kot so na primer podnebne spremembe in biotska raznovrstnost, zahtevajo geografsko perspektivo. Predstavljeni podatki, ki zajemajo vrsto kvantitativnih virov, kažejo, da obstaja upanje za ponovno oživitev študija geografije v Sloveniji. To zahteva tudi proaktivno sodelovanje s potencialnimi delodajalci, saj tudi razumevanje njihovih pričakovanj omogoča nenehno izboljševanje študijskega programa.

Zaključimo lahko, da je področje geografije na kritični točki, kjer so potrebna aktivna prizadevanja za preoblikovanje dojemanja in promocijo njenega pomena. Izziv za širšo skupnost poklicnih geografov je, da si s skupnimi močmi prizadevajo za izboljšanje trenutnega stanja. Z odpravljanjem napačnih predstav o geografiji in zagovarjanjem njenega pomena pri reševanju perečih globalnih izzivov lahko geografija ponovno pridobi svojo identiteto in si zagotovi položaj pomembne discipline na področju izobraževanja in širše.